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What did in Sorensen

Theodore Sorensen's failure to be confirmed is a warning that Congress will not balk at resuming a familiar tug-of-war to affect the tilt of President Carter's foreign policy.

Charges that Sorensen improperly handled classified material were the nub of the case against him. Sorensen was actually a tight-mouthed official, extremely loyal and circumspect in all matters relating to national security. If he left the White House in 1964 with some classified papers, it was because he was rushing to write an embroiled history of the Kennedy years.

But these charges sufficed as a handle for the many who felt for other reasons that Carter had made a bad choice. Sorensen was basically beaten by people who had worked with him, people who remembered him as much admired but rarely liked, as a loner whose gifts of intelligence did not include the ability to work easily with people.

Sorensen was Carter's first friend in the Kennedy circle and the Georgian was plainly struck by the wit and acumen of this unusual man. Carter's mistake was to let this impression divert his examination of warnings that Sorensen was a taut, testy personality who could be extremely haughty in arguing his positions. Carter failed to note that he was plainly not a figure

likely to mend the agency's political and administrative fences.

As Sorensen himself wrote in 1963, "personalities play an intangible but surprisingly important role" in government councils. Those who didn't like him could be alarmed by his pacifist leanings. John Kennedy counted Sorensen a key adviser in crisis situations, but he always took pains to keep the public from learning that Sorensen was involved, because he did not want it said that one of his advisers had declined to engage in debate.

The Sorensen's draft status gained weight in many minds from the militancy of the pacifist stance which he subsequently adopted in New York politics. As he testified this week, he would clearly have been prepared to "carry out every legal order" given him by President Carter. But his background threatened to leave the CIA more vulnerable to elements anxious to reduce it to a public library.

It will be necessary for American presidents to have staunch figures as secretaries of State and Defense, NSC adviser and CIA director so long as the Soviets are perceived as a threat. Sorensen was the only appointment of the four in which Carter seemed to have compromised with those bent on taking more precipitous

gambles in pursuit of peace.

Among these people, there exists a fierce hostility toward the CIA. This sentiment has many expressions. It was apparent in the eagerness of the committee that was headed by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, to prosecute a former CIA director, Richard Helms, for covering the agency's small part in the overthrow of Chile's Communist government. These pressures attest a readiness to embarrass the nation and do grave injustice to one man in order to spank the CIA.

The sentiment also surfaces in hostile articles which replay Communist accusations against the CIA. A recent one, widely published, revived a two-year-old charge by a Cuban agriculture minister that the CIA had spread disease among Cuba's pigs. Such stuff is calculated to diminish the public's trust in its intelligence. It warns that those who see the need for an intelligence system will have to stay alert.

Against these threats, the agency requires a leader who will be a strong supporter. George Bush came into the agency on the heels of the reformers and began the task of piecing together morale. He has adapted the agency to its new restraints while he warded off those who would cripple it further. The next director must wage the same struggle.